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ABSTRACT

Two major problems of state certification of teachers are decline in the quality of teacher candidates and the inability of qualified applicants to be certified without majoring in education. With improved knowledge about how good teachers teach and what is essential for beginning teachers to know, teacher education programs are likely to remain the primary route to a teaching career. However, it is reasonable to explore alternative routes to teacher certification. Prospective teachers without education degrees could be certified after successfully completing subject matter tests, a year-long district-based internship, and evening and/or summer school education coursework. Districts might choose to hire only graduates of teacher education programs or might consider implementing the alternative scheme. Providing an alternative way of certifying teachers will help attain the goal of placing the best teachers before students. (RH)

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# CERTIFICATION REFORM

Leo Klagholz & Saul Cooperman

There has been a considerable amount of discussion of a new teacher certification plan which I presented recently to the State Board of Education. The plan was developed in response to problems which exist in the present system of preparing and certifying new teachers.

It is my intent, in describing the problems and suggesting solutions, to afford all citizens and members of the education community an opportunity to discuss and debate all of the relevent issues.

I also recognize that no individual, educational organization or group has a monopoly on truth. Therefore, open public debate of these issues is not only healthy, it is necessary.

We cannot afford to feel threatened by criticism of our education system because, if criticism is constructive, it can result in improved education for students in our schools.

The state issues certificates to teachers as a means of insuring that only talented and capable people are permitted to teach in our schools, while denying that opportunity to those who are not capable. State licensing should provide the public with some reasonable assurance that those certified have been screened and judged competent. Yet, two major problems are evident:

## Decline in Quality

The first has to do with the decline in the quality of persons who are enrolling in college teacher preparation programs. There have been several studies of this trend nationwide which show that college students preparing to be teachers tend more and more to fall at the lower end of the academic spectrum. Last year, of those students who were admitted to our county and state colleges and who said they intended to major in education, 20 percent scored below 299 on the SAT verbal while 60 percent scored below 399.

The preliminary results of a new state test of writing ability revealed that many of our high school students have serious problems in this area. I believe it is urgent that we begin to make improvements in teaching our young people the skills of written expression. There is little reason to expect such improvements will occur if we employ new teachers who themselves possess academic deficiencies. Yet, because of the decline in quality of those enrolling in college teacher education programs, we are beginning to find ourselves in the position of routinely issuing teaching licenses to some of the least able of our college graduates.

A major aspect of my proposed plan would require all of those seeking certification to pass tests in their subject fields before being licensed to teach. A standardized test in subject matter field would assure minimum academic achievement and would screen out any students of low ability who might succeed in barely passing through their college programs.

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Talented Applicants

A second major problem has to do with the fact that the Department of Education regularly receives applications from persons who appear to be talented and able to contribute to our schools but did not major in education in college. Some of these applicants are already members of the teaching profession who work at private or parochial schools or at colleges where it is not required that one have studied education. Other applicants are experienced in a subject field, such as mathematics or science, and have taught part time or have otherwise been active with young people.

These people are experienced; they present outstanding references, and they are graduates of quality colleges. But no matter how capable they may be and no matter how great our need, we have no effective way of considering them for teaching positions because they did not major in education. We are forced to advise these people to return to college to take courses, or to quit their jobs and complete 8-12 weeks of practice teaching, and then to compete on the market for a job. It is little wonder that few of these talented persons, who have completed rigorous college programs, are able to enter teaching.

As a result, it seems we are not only routinely certifying persons of low ability, but we are also turning away quality applicants who want to teach.

The questions must be raised: Is it unreasonable to examine the strengths and weaknesses of our present system for selecting teachers? Is it wrong to explore ways of attracting better teachers to our school system? I believe it is both reasonable and urgent that we do so. If there is any chance of providing school children with a better education, the discomfort caused by criticizing our existing practice is more than justified.

The Present System

A close examination of our primary means of preparing and certifying teachers -- college teacher education programs -- does, indeed reveal weaknesses. These weaknesses are reflected in the two major elements of teacher preparation: courses and practice teaching. First, the programs attempt to provide prospective teachers with essential knowledge of the profession by requiring that they take about five education courses. They attempt to develop effective teaching skills by placing the college senior in a local school district to practice teach for a period of eight to twelve weeks. There is considerable disparity in both of these elements from one college to another. This inconsistency along with an absence of evidence of effectiveness, is such that it is reasonable to question an exclusive reliance on college teacher education programs. Let's examine practice teaching and education coursework.

Practice Teaching

The concept of practice teaching is sound and some colleges run high-quality programs. However, there are flaws and problems. For example, when college seniors are assigned to public schools, they displace salaried teachers in the district. That is, in order to practice his or her teaching skill, the college student actually takes the place of a salaried, district teacher who is released to provide supervision.

In addition, there is an economic motivation for colleges to enroll as many practice teachers as possible and, in order to graduate, each must be assigned

to work in a local district. Therefore, the number of college students who practice teach has no relationship to, and usually exceeds, the actual job openings. Further, school districts accept practice teachers as a professional obligation, but, although they must devote eight to twelve weeks to training practice teachers, there is small chance the sponsoring district will be able to hire these candidates. Therefore, there is little self interest on the part of the local district as there would be, for example, if the district were training a person whom it had employed.

Most importantly, the criteria used to decide which teachers are effective and which are not vary considerably from college to college. There does not appear to be a consistent basis for deciding which practice teachers should be recommended for certification. Finally, because practice teachers are assigned to various districts, it frequently is difficult for the college professors to visit and evaluate them. It is fair to say that many professors do not observe their practice teachers more that three times during their assignment to the schools.

Course Work

College preparation courses attempt to provide aspiring teachers with a knowledge of the profession through courses in education. As in the case of practice teachers, there is a wide disparity from college to college. A survey of six state colleges revealed over 120 different courses for education majors, those required at one college not even being offered at others. In addition to this lack of consensus, there is a significant gap of time between acquiring the knowledge and actually having to apply it on the job. Years may go by before the candidate obtains a teaching position and begins to apply knowledge learned in college. James Conant, who was one of America's leading educators summarized this problem in 1963 saying:

> Professors of education have not yet discovered or agreed upon a common body of knowledge that they all feel should be held by school teachers before the student takes his first full-time job. To put it another way, I find no reason to believe that students who have completed the sequences of courses in education in one college or university have considered the same, or even a similar set of facts or principles as their contemporaries in another institution even in the same state... Except for practice teaching the special (methodological) work combined with it, I see no rational basis for a state prescription of the time devoted to education courses... (methodology) should be made available at the moment the potential teacher most needs all the useful knowledge he can get; that is, when he actually begins to teach.

The collegiate approach, then, to preparing and certifying teachers must be improved, and I am committed to the support and improvement of college teacher education. My criticisms are not intended to demean the efforts of colleges, particularly those which have attempted to achieve high standards. Rather, they are voiced in an attempt to establish the need for improvement and to show that college preparation is not so reliable that we cannot consider other ways of obtaining talented teachers for our schools.

As a step toward improving college preparation, I will convene a panel of nationally recognized education researchers to help better define how good teachers teach and what is essential for beginning teachers to know about the profession. We will discuss this information with college teacher educators and use it to achieve greater consistency and reliability in their courses and practice teaching experiences. I do not believe it is unreasonable to want to explore these goals, and I hope that colleges will see this as an opportunity and will work with us in a positive spirit. With such changes in place, I would have no hesitancy in urging that those college students who know they want to teach prepare themselves by completing a college preparation program. When the recommendations of our national panel are implemented, along with the improvements initiated last year by the Chancellor and the State Board of Higher Education, I believe New Jersey could have teacher education programs which continue to stand as the primary route to a teaching career.

An Alternate Route

But what of those talented persons who want to teacher but did not take educational courses or practice teaching while in college? Is it unreasonable to want to explore alternative ways of accepting the best of these people into our schools?

Many citizens are often surprised to learn that New Jersey already has an alternative way to enter the teaching profession. The "emergency certificate," as it is called may be issued to anyone when a district can prove that it does not have an adequate pool of certified teachers. The emergency route is often referred to as a "back door" to the teaching profession because it can be issued to persons who do not possess the bachelor's degree or education courses and it allows the initial teaching experience to occur without quality controls. Districts may employ "emergency" teachers without orienting them, without providing special supervision and without training or assisting them once they begin to teach.

There are many cases in which untrained, emergency teachers continue on for several years without acquiring training or special assistance. The emergency system is not a system at all. It has no standards and its continued use cannot be justified. Therefore, a major part of the new plan would be the elimination of emergency and other "back door" approaches to certification.

We must find a way to accommodate talented applicants who do not have education backgrounds, and at the same time make the alternative system more rigorous.

Hundreds of qualified and talented people tell us they want to teach. Again, they include people who teach already, and others who have been successful but want to change careers. There are people from fields such as science, math, computing, drama, foreign languages and journalism who are experienced and have worked with children. They want training equal to or exceeding that of college education majors. However, they find it impossible to even consider changing careers when they are told that they must quit their present jobs and enroll in a college program. If they do take this risk, the college then places them in a school district where supervision is almost entirely provided by the school district, not the college. Then, after completing the 8-12 week initial teaching experience they are free to look for

jobs! It is little wonder that very few of these talented people will choose this option.

With respect to the first teaching experience, these applicants ask, "Since local districts conduct practice teaching for the college anyway, why must I go through the college? Can I be hired and then supervised? If I do well, I keep my job; if not, release me."

Regarding the five education courses usually required, they ask, "Is is possible for me to learn what is essential for a beginning teacher to know without taking courses in the college semester format?"

When talented people are so needed, our answer to all of these questions must be an emphatic, "Yes!" We can ill afford to turn such people away from our schools when the requirements may be easily met if we are resolved to find a way. We must find ways of opening our classroom doors without sacrificing the need for essential training.

I believe that local districts should be permitted to seek out such talented persons and, as long as they pass the subject matter test, employ them provisionally, providing them with essential knowledge and effective training skills during an on-the-job internship.

Practice Teaching

As I have mentioned before, local districts already provide practice teaching opportunities for college students. The college assigns the senior to a school district to practice and refine his or her teaching abilities under the supervision of the principal and a teacher in the school. There is every reason, then, to believe that districts would be able to provide this supervision and training to provisional teachers whom it has employed.

On its face, there would appear to be little difference between a district-operated internship and practice teaching. In fact, the internship approach even has certain potential advantages. For example, the district would have a strong interest in the quality of training because, unlike the practice teachers, each candidate would actually be employed.

In addition, districts which hire alternate candidates and operate internships would have to meet certain standards and requirements which they need not meet in order to conduct practice teaching. For example, I will use the recommendations of our panel of educational researchers defining how good teachers teach, to structure consistent criteria to be used in the internships in order to judge which candidates are effective. Principals and teachers who would supervise and assist the provisional teachers would receive training themselves before accepting this responsibility. In short, the rigor of the internship would go well beyond that of practice teaching as a quality-controlled, first teaching experience.

Therefore, those applicants who did not take practice teaching and who asked for an equivalent or superior training experience can be assured of receiving it through the internship. Even the length of the one-year internship exceeds that of practice teaching (8-12 weeks), although districts could dismiss an ineffective provisional teacher at any point.

It is clear, then, that districts already provide training experiences for college students and that they could provide the same training for an employed provisional teacher. The internship plan I have proposed would simply require that they do so and that the training is a least equal to or exceeds that which districts now provide.

Courses

The only remaining consideration, then, is how to provide the provisional teacher with the equivalent of the approximately five education courses taken by college education majors. In addition, a determination must be made as to who should provide the necessary instruction. The panel of researchers that I intend to convene will establish a focus for this aspect of the program by defining what is essential for beginning teachers to know. The decision on how to convey the knowledge and who should be involved can be guided by an examination of the college approach.

College courses usually are offered in a 15-week-semester format, each course meeting for about three hours a week. However, colleges themselves often vary the structure. For example, courses are often offered during a six-week summer session with meeting time increased from three hours a week to about eight. In addition, colleges sometimes offer a course during 15-day periods in the summer. When a course is compressed into 15 days, it usually meets 15 hours a week.

College education courses are most often taught by faculty who are employed full-time by the institution. However, all colleges use "adjunct" professors to teach courses and some colleges rely heavily on adjunct instructors. In education, these part-time professors frequently are teachers, supervisors and administrators from local school districts who teach the course in the evening, summers, or on weekends. Some courses are, in fact, taught at the location of the local district using its facilities and its personnel as instructors.

The college course approach to conveying knowledge to prospective teachers is certainly valid, yet two points require emphasis. The first is that, by varying the format and structure of courses, colleges reflect the accurate assumption that learning can take place in a variety of ways and settings. Second, with respect to who might convey the knowledge, both full-time professors and local district professionals already perform this role in teaching college courses.

In structuring this aspect of the internship for provisional teachers, an obvious alternative would be simply to require that college courses be taken on-location, compressed into the summer session or three-week formats, or in the evening during the first year. The important thing is that they acquire the knowledge as effectively as possible.

In this respect, I believe the internship holds the potential for conveying knowledge in a way which is exciting and vivid and which, in the spirit of James Conant's analysis, provides the opportunity to integrate knowledge and practice.

Let us assume, hypothetically that our national panel tells us that all beginning teachers should acquire a knowledge of special education. As soon as the provisional teacher is employed, usually between March and July, scholarly readings on this subject could be assigned. In fact, it would be possible to use the same materials that colleges use with education majors. However, it is not difficult to imagine the high motivational level of the provisional teacher -- who would be preparing to assume a specific job -- in approaching these materials.

It would be possible to conduct an orientation session during the summer before the provisional teacher begins to work. College special education professors could be involved in this, but so also could the district psychologist and other members of the local child study team. These persons could not only give advice on how, for example, to identify a learning handicap, but they could also review with the provisional teacher actual case records of students in the district.

During the course of the school year, the provisional teacher could be observed frequently by experienced district teachers and the school principal and could confer with the child study team regarding approaches to be used with special needs students actually identified. The provisional teacher could apply these approaches under supervision and modify his teaching based on advice received. Workshops and seminars could be held during the course of the year to further integrate and refine techniques.

The emphasis of the internship with respect to theoretical knowledge is not merely on the abstract but on the application of knowledge in the classroom. There would be no gap of years, as there often is for college education majors, between the time knowledge is acquired and the time it is actually applied.

There are many ways to acquire knowledge and I believe that, with some careful planning, the district internship could provide a means by which persons employed from fields other than education could gain professional knowledge in a way that is both exciting and highly effective.

The present alternative to the college route, the "emergency" system, allows the employment of untrained persons without requiring that they receive any special assistance or supervision. I want to replace this system with a rigorous internship which would provide districts the opportunity to consider and employ talented persons from fields other than education.

I have illustrated some possible characteristics of the internship. However, its design is flexible. A state advisory committee of those interested in education -- teachers, administrators, college representatives, PTA members, local board members and citizens at large -- will advise me as to what the specific requirements should be.

Some districts may want to continue hiring only graduates of teacher education programs, and that would be acceptable. Indeed, we believe this will continue to be the primary route to certification. However, others may want to consider employing talented and capable persons who did not study education, and the internship approach provides that choice.

We have no vested interest in either system, no economic motive, and no obligation to protect the existing system.

Our only goal is to place the best teachers before our students.

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